

Socialism

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Socialism encompasses a great diversity of sometimes mutually antagonistic political movements and philosophies that developed in Europe about three centuries ago, though their roots can be traced to the late feudal period. Their heterogeneity notwithstanding, socialisms have in common the ideal of establishing a society founded on the cooperative management of resources for the benefit of all. By the mid 19th century, internationalist organizations formed that eventually fragmented into communist, anarchist, syndicalist, and reformist camps. There are crucial points of divergence among these broad socialist groupings in terms of political strategy, medium-term ends, and organizational structure, giving rise to political practices ranging from dictatorial statism and reformist social democracy to anti-statist anarchism and communism. Academic geographers in core capitalist regions largely ignored socialist theories until the late 1960s, with their adoption by an emergent radical geography school that rapidly splintered into various factions, some of which disavowed socialist perspectives altogether. In Soviet-influenced regions, geographers, with rare but influential exceptions, followed a statist ideology that shifted according to changes in communist party policy.

Origins

By the time it circulated in print in the 1820s in Britain and France, the term socialism already described several, sometimes mutually antagonistic political currents in different parts of Europe. In part, this diversity can be attributed to the relatively deep roots of socialist political movements and philosophies. The peasant-dominated revolts, alternative communities, and neo-Platonic and millenarian philosophical schools beginning some 500 years ago all contributed to the shaping of critical perspectives that eventually evolved into what is now called socialism (some argue for even earlier origins, but the social contexts and philosophical content of earlier rebellions, such as the one led by Spartacus, are much too different from and hardly linked to specifically socialist struggles).

Responding to late feudal social contradictions and tensions, these rebellions, alternative political practices, and new conceptions of society were inspired by communalistic ideals, which were often supported through religious principles and argumentation and posited in contrast to an emerging social order that threatened or destroyed peasant livelihoods and many forms of socially cooperative practices. Alternative societal ideals were also influenced by the first sustained and ultimately destructive contacts between Native Americans and Africans and largely western European colonists. The spread of knowledge in Europe about societies radically different from those then known (among European elites) inspired much speculation about alternative social realities.

Utopianism

Combined with major philosophical and religious shifts, such speculation resulted in the first writings engaging with the social tensions associated with an emergent social order (e.g., Thomas Moore's "Utopia" and Tommaso Campanella's "Civitas solis"). Such works envisioned the development of morally just societies based on the cultivation of social harmony through the imposition of strict behavioral codes and asceticism and on the suppression of money, profit, and/or private property. In his "History of political economy" of 1839, Jerome Blanqui would refer to these precursors as Utopian Socialist, a term adopted and popularized through Marx and

Engels' "Communist manifesto" of 1848, to demarcate these earlier prescriptive imaginings from what was viewed as a more progressive scientific approach. These precursors to socialist thought were largely isolated from the mostly peasant movements and millenarian philosophies, which arose in response to the economic duress imposed by aristocratic elites and hardly sought the formation of an entirely new social order.

Though a direct link between Utopians and peasant uprisings did not exist, Utopian critiques had gained widespread influence among both social reformers and leaders of mass movements through the circulation of translations in debating circles among both clerical and secular elites and scholars (e.g., the revolutionary theology of Thomas Müntzer, Huldreich Zwingli's social program in 1520's Zürich). Such influence on movement leaders can be discerned in the insistence on specifically communal access or even control of land, besides the demands for the reduction of levies, which already questioned the legitimacy of elite privileges. Through land struggles, peasant movements challenged the distribution of wealth on the basis of private property. This can partly explain the especially savage and vindictive manner through which the feudal monarchies suppressed millenarian movements. But peasant revolts were not the only manifestation of late feudal social tensions. There were sporadic, urban-centered artisan movements struggling for higher wages, better working conditions, and greater control over the means to livelihood. The first such struggle occurred with the Ciompi rebellion of 1388, which met a fate similar to peasant revolts. At times, the interests of peasants and artisans converged so that the two groupings merged into single mass movements.

The extreme reprisals and moderate concessions of the 16th century contributed to a relative hiatus in the demands for greater political inclusion and more economic equality. The exception was in Britain with the Levelers and Diggers (whose ideas were largely represented in the writings of Winstanley) in the 1640s and 1650s. Communities sometimes inspired by mixtures of millenarian and Utopian Socialist principles were also founded in the American colonies, at times to seek refuge from persecution (e.g., Bruderhof Hutterite communes). Otherwise, peasant and urban insurrections continued, with hundreds if not thousands of peasants murdered by better-organized armies, but their content was largely limited to reactions to overwhelming taxation systems (e.g., France under Louis XIV) or foreign rule (e.g. against the Spanish Crown in the Kingdom of Naples). Radical intellectual circles were similarly decimated and it was not until the mid to late 18th century that Utopian Socialist writings re-emerge in trenchant critical form, most famously with those of Rousseau but also through Morelly and later Mably, who advocated reforms towards the development of a communist society. These critiques were in reaction to philosophical apologists of capitalism, such as Quesnay and Voltaire, with whom they engaged in lengthy debates.

During the 17th and 18th century, with the twin developments of peasant dispossession and proletarianization and industrialization, mainly in Britain and its north American colonies, waged worker discontent added considerably to pre-existing peasant unrest. Though early worker revolts manifested themselves through general strikes (e.g., in 1740 and 1786 in France), radical intellectual circles were hardly responsive to or representative of workers' and peasants' conditions or demands, possibly because most intellectuals' interests lay in the reform of monarchical and emerging capitalist arrangements, rather than their overthrow. The exception was again Britain and its North American colonies, where the increasing proletarian population was more effectively integrated through greater political concessions thanks to the war and succeeding constitutional reforms of 1688 (workers already associated into craft unions by the 1720s).

In other parts of Europe, regimes were much more dictatorial and capitalist elites were embryonic, so that conditions for the emergence of specifically socialist alternatives did not yet exist. In Germany, for example, it took political economic unification, state-directed industrialization, and a repressive monarchy, and the defeat of Lassalle's brand of socialism, among other processes, to produce viable socialist and trade union movements (which enabled the formation of the most influential socialist force in Europe in the Social Democratic Party by the 1890s), and this did not transpire until the 19th century. However, in mid to late 18th century France, famine, excessive taxation burdens, a general fiscal crisis, and political repression, among other factors, led to a simultaneous revolt of both a rising bourgeoisie and the peasant and proletarian poor. The latter swelled the ranks of a highly variegated, grassroots movement (the *sans culottes*) that was strongly influenced by Rousseau's ideas and therefore excluded demands for the abolition of private property and/or money, in contrast to earlier political struggles described above.

Constitutional changes following the toppling of the monarchy in 1789 therefore addressed only formal political structures. In any case, various forces conspired violently in the 1790s to ensure that only a privileged male capitalist minority would mostly benefit from the revolution (as reflected in the guillotining of playwright and women's rights advocate Olympe de Gouges in 1793). Despite the non-socialist nature of the revolution, events in France became a fulcrum for the development of socialist thought and movements. This is partly due to a minority of radicals that took the egalitarian promises of the revolution seriously and thereby endeavored to develop systematic socialist programs. A conceptualization of politics in terms of class struggle emerged later, along with a delineation of a specifically communist and more systematic political platform. At first, it was very much the view of a small minority, especially associated with the Conspiracy of the Equals (a secret society led by Baboeuf), most of whose membership became another victim of post-revolutionary repression.

In the aftermath of violence and political repression in France and with the spread of large-scale industrial methods of production, solutions to the "social question", as tensions connected to capitalist development came to be understood, were increasingly formulated in terms of the collective management of the economy. Self-described socialist groups began to form by the 1820s and envisioned a progressive improvement of workers' conditions through formal political bargaining and/or an extension of private property to economically disadvantaged groups, whose suffrage would be thereby secured. However, each group developed different strategies for a socialist transformation of society.

The followers of Fourier, Owen and his followers, and the cooperative movement built or promulgated writings on exemplary, self-contained communities or producers societies in Europe as well as the Americas. The followers of Saint-Simon pressed the state for the establishment of a technocratic order based on the large-scale scientific management of the economy. Most syndicalists, especially in Britain, organized workers to improve social conditions and largely accepted the legitimacy of the existing social order, at least in economically prosperous years. Finally, Jacobins, a prominent grouping during the French revolution, strove to turn state institutions into organs for the gradual extension of political rights for all. Shared by all the major socialist movements was the belief that everyone involved in production could eventually cooperate to improve society for mutual benefit, which assumed a harmonious relationship between, for instance, peasants, industrialists, and workers.

Scientific socialism, internationalism, and state power

It was not until the 1830s and certainly following 1848, with the suppression of mass revolts and the onset of even more repressive regimes, that most socialist political movements and philosophies increasingly converged towards a more Baboeuvist tendency, though not necessarily in the form of secret societies. This tendency intermingled with existing evolutionary theories that saw social change unfolding through contradictory tensions within society itself, as formulated by Cabet, Spence, and Saint-Simon, for example. Such strands of thought, as well as those of Hegel and the Ricardians later on, are what enabled Marx and Engels' analysis of capitalism as a system of dispossession and exploitation and their development of dialectical historical materialism. Their ideas impacted socialist movements internationally with the publication of the Communist Manifesto and through the debates in the International Workingmen's Association (the First International). They became highly influential from the 1890s onwards as part of the political philosophies propounded by the German Social Democratic Party. Eventually, a few of the Marxist scions evolved into statist and vanguardist approaches that formed the ideological backbone of state-socialist dictatorial regimes (these approaches are reminiscent of the communist current represented by the Conspiracy of the Equals in late 18th century France and, in the succeeding century, that of Blanqui). Other theories also developed out of similar critical perspectives, such as Proudhon's federalism and Godwin's social individualism. Their ideas prepared the ground for the reception of theories from Bakunin, Kropotkin, and the Owenite Benbouw, among others, who stressed the inseparability of state and capitalism and therefore the necessity to overcome both simultaneously. Such ideas influenced the formation of revolutionary syndicalist and anarcho-communist movements, especially in southern Europe, and revolutions in places like the Ukraine, Mexico, and Spain, in the 1900s.

In other words, by the time an internationalist socialist organization took shape in the form of the First International in 1864 (which fell apart less than a decade later), socialism was already broadly divided into syndicalist, anarchist, communist, and statist factions. This diversity deeply affected any attempts at international coordination among socialist movement. From the very beginning, the major contentions among and within the different camps were over the level and type of centralization and coordination (both internal organizational structure and a future and/or intermediate society), the type of general strategies (national and international, seizing the state and stage-based progression, gradualism through electioneering and reforms, immediate singular or succeeding revolutions, etc.), methods of political engagement (propagandist, insurrectional, parliamentary, and/or interventionist, etc.), and the relationship to and role of state institutions. The lack of consensus on these issues often degenerated into bitter struggles for political influence and/or institutional supremacy. The effects were such salient self-defeating events as the lack of support from British and some French socialists for the Paris Commune in 1871 and the folding of both the First and Second International (the Third International was essentially reduced to a foreign policy organ of the USSR), as well as the subsequent proliferation of international socialist organizations that ignored each other, multiplied similar efforts, or actively sabotaged one another.

Some socialist groupings eventually succeeded in gaining political power through statist strategies (e.g., in 1848 France, 1890s Germany, in 1917 Russia) and evolved into social democratic or labor parties and/or repressive rulers of socialist states or states rising from anti-colonial national-liberation struggles (if one were to confine the analysis to mere labels, socialist political practice could even include neoliberal capitalism, judging by the policies of socialist parties in western Europe represented in the Socialist International). As part of institutionalized

political formations, socialism is therefore often difficult to distinguish from other mainstream political practices centered on modernization and capitalist economic arrangements (e.g., wage-based employment).

Other socialist camps remained largely on the fringes of the political mainstream and at times suffered massacres at the hands of both liberal democratic and Soviet or Maoist state-socialist forces. However, they were influential in the global revolts of 1968, which was an outpouring of liberation movements long excluded within most socialist institutions, and have arguably been important in current antisystemic movements, through the World Social Forum, among other international groupings.

In sum, since the 1800s, socialism developed into diverse theories and movements that gradually gained prominence in Europe and in parts of the world colonized by European empires. Partially as a result of global capitalist expansionism and the collapse of one exploitative statist model (the USSR), socialist ideas and politics continue to proliferate worldwide at the level of both grassroots organizing and state and international institutions. The persistence of this influence has prompted reactions, sometimes violent, on the part of elites opposed to any concessions to socialist or socialist-inspired demands.

Socialisms and geographers

Even though geography had been institutionalized by the 1820s (first in Germany), socialist ideas did not become influential to any appreciable degree until the late 1960s, when institutional socialism, reduced either to Soviet or Maoist dogma or parliamentary reformism, was already under pressure from alternative grassroots movements. In fact, from their very beginnings, all socialist variants were challenged and shaped by actual social practices and historical events, such as the Haitian revolution of 1804 and early feminist movements of the 19th century, that is, prior to the emergence of human geography as part of academic institutions. But the questioning of colonialism, racism, and masculinism implied in such events and movements rarely took center stage in the debates and policies of the various socialist camps, at least not until the 1960s. The overwhelming majority of academic geographers genuinely believed in the neutrality of their work or shied well clear of politically risky involvement. The tendency, regardless, was to reinforce, if not willfully contribute to prevailing ideologies, state apparatuses, and imperialistic foreign policies. The 19th century writings and political engagement of the anarchist geographers Peter Kropotkin and Elise Reclus represented very rare instances of social critique.

By the late 1960s, heterodox variants of Marxism and, to a lesser extent, collectivist anarchism gained more academic support more than a century later as a result of changes in the social composition of academic geography, changes that fostered greater sensitization to contemporary political upheavals. Within the rising radical geography wing of human geography, it was Marxist theories that gained prominence, due to their greater theoretical systematicity, larger body of available literature, and relatively more politically prominent history and clout. Arguably, it was in select western European and North American geography departments where a major shift occurred and where deep dissatisfaction with existing academic orientations compelled a minority to shape new areas of study of greater relevance to wider society. The dissatisfaction originated from a dissonance between the theoretical potentials discovered through political activism and the prevailing geographical epistemologies and methodologies (largely closed and descriptive quantitative perspectives implicitly imbued with capitalist ideologies) that constrained the development of social theory. Richard Peet's founding of the journal "Antipode" in 1969 provided a pivotal academic outlet for radical geographers, whose

early work primarily engaged with issues of social justice (e.g., discrimination against women, racism, worker exploitation, uneven development, environmental degradation). Internal theoretical debates and the establishment of the Union of Socialist Geographers in 1974 eventually steered radical geography toward more socialist and especially Marxist perspectives. Scholarly works of wide intellectual influence subsequently propelled such theoretical approaches into the mainstream of Anglophone geography by the 1980s (e.g., David Harvey's "Social justice and the city", published in 1973, Neil Smith's "Uneven development", published in 1984, or the 1980s recuperation of Henri Lefebvre's "The production of space", published in 1974).

These socialist strands were soon challenged from within the same radical intellectual circles. This was due to a lack of involvement with other coeval social struggles and theory-building that addressed inequalities and repressive practices related to cultural constructions of race, gender, sexuality, ability, among other processes exploitative and suppressive of corporeal diversity that were largely ignored by most Marxists. Feminist scholars, for instance, questioned the treatment of working class perspectives in universalist terms, since they often reflected the realities of only some men in some social contexts. Such empirically erroneous universalizations on the part of many Marxists bears unfortunate resemblances to historically tunnel-visioned political practices, such as the indifference of trade unions or socialist organizations and parties towards the outcomes of the strikes of the 1830s by women workers in Lowell textile factories in the United States or the women's suffrage movements in different parts of the world.

Since the late 1980s, there have been many debates about the status of class relative to other social processes that have problematized the masculine, white European, heterosexual subject implied in much of socialist thought and political practice. In spite of the splintering of various groups and sometimes acrimonious nature of argumentation, the debates have resulted in constructive shifts in different socialist strands, within and outside human geography, which finally take seriously and integrate analytically the many axes of social processes, including patriarchy, heterosexism, racialization, ablism, and agism. The influences of many social movements, including feminist, anti-racist, postcolonial, and queer, on socialist groups and on human geography have greatly improved the epistemological and ontological premises of socialist practices and theories in academic settings, leading to integrative approaches such as Marxist and anarchist feminisms. At the same time, greater concern for ecological and nonhuman realities have opened up different forms of socialism to more holistic understandings that are now emerging in the forms of such movements as ecosocialism, ecoMarxism, material ecofeminism, and Marxist-feminist environmentalism. In spite of these convergent tendencies, there remain many obstacles to integration of different strands of socialism within human geography (as in the world generally), while some existing socialist movements and human geographers of socialist persuasion continue to ignore the above-mentioned critiques, especially within institutionalized political formations that still claim affinity to socialist philosophies.

In the Soviet-dominated or influenced contexts, geographers mostly followed (or were forced to follow) a rigid catechism that was a parody of Marx's (and even Lenin's) writings. Academic geography was often subordinated to the functioning of the administrative organs of the state. No socialist geography actually developed that was independent of ruling party elites, but there were major shifts in the late 1950s (e.g., expressed in Anuchin's work) and the late 1970s and 1980s, with the appearance of social or humanistic geography. This was also part of a general reaction against the reductionism of quantitative approaches that was facilitated by wider

political apertures, a reaction not too dissimilar to its radical counterpart in Western Europe and North America and that would merit a comparative analysis.

An account of alternative academic geographies encompassing other parts of the world remains to be written. However, one might expect substantively different intellectual histories as well as continuities. Though largely Eurocentric socialist theories (especially of the Soviet and Maoist varieties) have often been superimposed in a facile manner in (post)colonial situations for geopolitical expedience (e.g., in national liberation struggles), most non-European intellectuals have also been trained through Eurocentric canons. Heterodox geographical traditions may therefore be ensconced within non-European socialist theories, not necessarily within academic geography (as in the case of Bogdanov in Russia or Foucault and Lefebvre in France). The emergence of these traditions may be enabled by the USSR's demise and the intensification of capitalist expansionism, which has facilitated renewed interest in socialist theories and politics and a blossoming of research on socialism in practice.

Further Reading

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Relevant Websites

Anarchist Archives

http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/index.html

Established and run by Professor Dana Ward at Pitzer College, California, this English-language on-line archive contains the collected writings of most anarchist thinkers, as well as links to major anarchist periodicals and weeklies. A section on the history of anarchism around the world is also included.

Marxist Internet Archive

<http://www.marxists.org/>

A volunteer-administered comprehensive on-line collection of Marx' and Engels' writings, as well as those of Marxist and feminist writers and of non-Marxist socialist and even non-socialist thinkers that contributed to Marxist schools of thought. Many texts are also available in 44 languages, aside from English.